

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02235 120941Z
ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2235

STADIS//////////

FOR NEA AND PM ONLY

FOR ATHERTON FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR MASS PINS LE US
SUBJ: MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR THE LEBANESE ARMY

REF: STATE 100273

1. I HAVE DISCUSSED REFTEL WITH DATT AND THE FOLLOWING IS
OUR JOINT RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS RAISED PARA 5 REFTEL.

A. WE DOUBT THAT A USG OFFER TO SUPPLY EQUIPMENT FOR
BATTALIONS BEING FORMED BY GENERAL KHOURY WILL LEAD TO
BURDENSOME COMMITMENTS OR TOTAL STANDARDIZATION BY LAF ON U.S.
MATERIEL. FROM MILITARY POINT OF VIEW, FULL STANDARDIZATION
IS LOGICAL OBJECTIVE OF ANY ARMY; EFFICIENCY OF LAF HAS IN THE
PAST SUFFERED FROM HAVING WIDE VARIETY OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF
RIFLES, FOR EXAMPLE. HOWEVER, GOL IS UNLIKELY TO BE
INTERESTED IN COMPLETE STANDARDIZATION ON AMERICAN EQUIPMENT,
PARTICULARLY IF WE ARE TALKING ABOUT SALES, NOT GRANT AID.
LEBANESE ARMY HAS STRONG HISTORY OF COOPERATION AND
SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY
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FRANCE AND THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO WANT TO BREAK THESE
TIES COMPLETELY. FURTHERMORE, WE BELIEVE THAT FRENCH
AND BRITISH WILL BE EQUALLY INTERESTED IN MAINTAINING
SOME MILITARY SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH LEBANESE. WE
THEREFORE SUSPECT THAT MOST LIKELY AND DESIRABLE ACTION
MIGHT BE STANDARDIZATION ON A FEW U.S. ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT,
SUCH AS RIFLES, ANTI-TANK WEAPONS OR JEEPS. AS FOR

SIZE OF LAF, GENERAL KHOURY'S PLANS APPEAR TO BE TENTATIVE AND FLEXIBLE AT THIS POINT. THIS SUBJECT IS DISCUSSED IN MORE DETAIL IN SEPARATE IR BEING PREPARED BY DATT.

B. IT MAY NOT TAKE TOO MUCH TO BUILD UP LAF TO "PARITY OF FIREPOWER WITH THE FORCES OF DISORDER" IF MAIN-LINE FATAH UNITS ARE EXCLUDED. EFFECTIVENESS OF LAF IS A QUESTION OF ORGANIZATION, MORALE AND DISCIPLINE ALMOST AS MUCH AS IT IS OF EQUIPMENT. FRANKLY, WE THINK IT WILL BE SOME TIME BEFORE PRIVATE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS WILL WILLINGLY GIVE UP THEIR REMAINING HEAVY WEAPONS, BUT THE STRONGER THE LEBANESE CENTRAL ARMY, THE MORE LIKELY THE LEBANESE ARE TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN IT AND THE MORE EFFECTIVE IT WILL BE IN ENFORCING DECISIONS OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, POSSIBLY INCLUDING AT SOME FUTURE TIME THE DISARMING OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS. THE PALESTINIANS, REJECTIONISTS AND OTHERS, WILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN CARE OF BY THE ASF FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

C. ACCORDING TO LATEST INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO DATT, MATERIEL CURRENTLY IN LAF INVENTORIES IS AS FOLLOWS:

ARMORED VEHICLES:

10 - SUPER SHERMAN TANKS (2 UNSERVICEABLE)
5 - AMX - 13 TANKS (105MM)
4 - AMX - 13 TANKS (75MM)
16 - PANHARD STAGHOUND RECON VEHICLES (90MM)
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4 - PANHARD M-3 PERSONNEL CARRIERS
14 - M113 APC'S

ARTY:

10 - 155MM HOWITZERS (2 UNSERVICEABLE)
5 - 25 POUNDERS (BRITISH 88MM)
6 - D-30 122MM HOWS
4 - 122MM GUNS

ALL OF THIS EQUIPMENT IS IN EXTREMELY POOR CONDITION; TANK ENGINES AND TRACKS HAVE NOT BEEN MAINTAINED AND MANY GUN TUBES HAVE BEEN FIRED WELL BEYOND THEIR NORMAL USEFUL LIFE SPAN. LAF HAS NOT REPEAT NOT RECEIVED ANY EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE SINCE END OF HOSTILITIES IN NOVEMBER, 1976. "MILITARY VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT" MENTIONED REFTEL WERE SUPPLIED BY SAUDIS FOR GOL INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (ISF) NOT REPEAT NOT THE LAF. FRANCE HAS REPORTEDLY INDICATED WILLINGNESS TO SELL MATERIEL TO GOL AND SEND MILITARY ADVISORS BUT

NOT REPEAT NOT TO GIVE MILITARY AID. BRITISH HAVE APPARENTLY TAKEN SAME POSITION. SYRIANS HAVE SHOWN GREAT INTEREST IN FUTURE OF LAF AND INDICATED THEY COULD MAKE SOME SOVIET EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE BUT NO DEAL HAS BEEN CONCLUDED. GENERAL KHOURY IS NOT REPEAT NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT SOVIET EQUIPMENT OR SYRIAN ADVISORS.

D. AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, SARKIS/EL-HOSS GOVERNMENT OPERATING UNDER EXTRAORDINARY POWERS WOULD BE ABLE TO MOVE EXPEDITIOUSLY TO NEGOTIATE FMS AGREEMENT. THESE POWERS ARE CURRENTLY DUE TO EXPIRE IN JUNE, HOWEVER, AND WE HAVE NO ASSURANCE AT THIS TIME THAT THEY WILL BE RENEWED.

2. DATT WILL BE PROVIDING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON LAF DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN HIS REGULAR REPORTS, WITHOUT REFERRING TO THIS MESSAGE OR REFTEL.
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